

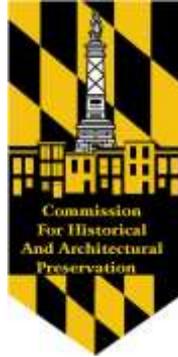
**Baltimore City  
Commission for Historical and  
Architectural Preservation**

**Landmark Designation Report  
February 9, 2016**



**St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church**

655 N. Bentalou St.  
Baltimore, Maryland



COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

ERIC HOLCOMB, *Executive Director*

Charles L. Benton, Jr. Building 417 East Fayette Street Eighth Floor Baltimore, MD 21202-3416  
410-396-4866



STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE  
*Mayor*



THOMAS J. STOSUR  
*Director*

## **Significance Summary**

The building today known as St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church was constructed in 1922 for the German Reformed Immanuel Church congregation, which was founded in 1866. The building was designed by John Freund, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Baltimore architect who designed a number of Gothic Revival churches. In 1956, the church was sold to the trustees of the St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church. Spencer G. Dobson was the founding pastor, and following his death, his son Harold L. Dobson served as the pastor. The church has a history of activism in civil rights, alleviating poverty, and founding one of the city's first African American church-based nursery schools. It has also served as a leader in local and national Baptist conferences. Church leaders participated in demonstrations to desegregate Gwynn Oak amusement park in the 1960s, and leading the Black Protestant Coalition Against United Way in the 1980s to gain more African American input in the dispersal of funds from that charity.

## **Property History**

This stone Gothic Revival church was constructed in 1922 for the congregation of German Reformed Immanuel Church in the Edmondson neighborhood of Baltimore City.<sup>1</sup> The property is located a block north of Edmondson Ave, at the intersection of N. Bentalou St. and Lanvale St. It is located one block west of a railroad. The surrounding block is comprised of two-story two bay wide porch-front brick rowhouses constructed in the 1920s. While the neighborhood is not designated as a historic district locally or nationally, it shares architectural characteristics with other designated neighborhoods.

The German American congregation that built this church was founded on October 30, 1866, with 39 members and with Rev. Dr. John Kuelling as the pastor.<sup>2</sup> The church was part of the Baltimore Classis, German Synod of the East of the Reformed Church in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The congregation first constructed a church in 1868 at 1000 W. Saratoga St, at the northwest corner of W. Saratoga St. and N. Schroeder St. in the Poppleton neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> The building is still extant.

In 1921, the congregation purchased land for a new church from the Edmondson Realty Company at the southeast corner of W. Lanvale St. and N. Bentalou St.<sup>5</sup> In 1922, plans for the new building were announced. The congregation planned to construct a church, parsonage, and community house, but ultimately, only the church was built.<sup>6</sup> A *Sun* article announced in June 1922 that plans for a new edifice for the "Immanuel Reformed Church" at Lanvale and Bentalou Streets were filed with the Building Inspector, and the white marble structure would have a seating capacity of 750.<sup>7</sup> The church was designed to be two stories tall, 55 feet by 85 feet, and would cost \$105,000, with the ultimate cost of the three buildings to be \$200,000.<sup>8</sup> John Freund was the architect, and Edward G. Turner was the contractor.<sup>9</sup>

John Freund (1877-1932) was a local Baltimore architect who was active in the early twentieth century. He designed a variety of buildings, including many Gothic Revival-style religious structures, and apartment buildings. Some of his other works include the

Riviera Apartments on Druid Park Lake Drive, Shaarei Zion Synagogue in Park Circle, and St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Dundalk.<sup>10</sup>

On April 20, 1956, the German Reformed Immanuel Congregation sold the property to St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church, Inc.<sup>11</sup> St Mark's Institutional Baptist Church was founded earlier that year by Rev. Spencer G. Dobson, his wife Estelle, and several other followers, who first met in the Dobsons' living room.<sup>12</sup> Prior to establishing this church, Dobson was the pastor at First Baptist Church in Pimlico for 18 years.<sup>13</sup> Following the death of Spencer Dobson in 1987, his son Rev. Harold Dobson, who had served as a Minister in the church, became the Pastor until his death in 2009.<sup>14</sup> His brother was the pastor at Union Baptist Church for many years, so there were close ties between those churches as well. In 2009, Rev. Reginald Lawrence was called to be pastor, and he brought his congregation from the Disciples Bible Baptist Church to merge with St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church.<sup>15</sup>

St. Mark's has been very involved in the larger Baptist community, the surrounding community, and the Civil Rights movement in Baltimore. The congregation was active in both local and national Baptist conferences. Rev. Dobson was a member of the Baptist Ministerial Conference, the United Missionary Baptist Convention of Maryland, and served on the board of an ashram at a religious retreat center at Keuka College.<sup>16</sup> Members of St. Mark's have been involved in local and national mission work.

The congregation has also been very involved in meeting the needs of the community. This took several forms. The nursery school established at St. Mark's was one of the first church-based nursery schools for African American children in Baltimore City. Directed by Anne Dobson Ware, the nursery school served the community for over 25 years.<sup>17</sup> The church also engaged in civil rights activism and efforts to alleviate poverty. Church leaders participated in demonstrations to desegregate Gwynn Oak amusement park in the 1960s, and leading the Black Protestant Coalition Against United Way in the 1980s to gain more African American input in the dispersal of funds from that charity.<sup>18</sup> Today, the congregation is still active in community issues and is a caring steward of this building and its history.

The property is not listed as historic on a federal or state inventory.

### **Architectural Description**

The property consists of a two story tall stone Gothic Revival church. The three bay wide façade faces west towards N. Bentalou St., and features a prominent buttressed belltower on the north bay, an ornate loggia entrance surmounted by a large central rose window in the central bay, and a smaller tower with a lancet window on the south bay. The steep front gabled roof is clad with slate. The side elevations are five bays deep, and feature buttressing between each bay, paired arched stained glass windows on the main floor in each bay, and paired double hung windows on the exposed basement level. There are also small dormer windows in the roof over each bay. There is a one-story rear addition. The church sits on 0.56 acres, with ample lawn on the rear and south side of the building.

## **Staff Recommendations**

The property meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards:

B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;
3. That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The building today known as St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church was constructed in 1922 for the German Reformed Immanuel Church congregation, which was founded in 1866. The building was designed by John Freund, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Baltimore architect who designed a number of Gothic Revival churches. In 1956, the church was sold to the trustees of the St. Mark's Institutional Baptist Church. Spencer G. Dobson was the founding pastor, and following his death, his son Harold L. Dobson served as the pastor. The church has a history of activism in civil rights, alleviating poverty, and founding one of the city's first African American church-based nursery schools. It has also served as a leader in local and national Baptist conferences. Church leaders participated in demonstrations to desegregate Gwynn Oak amusement park in the 1960s, and leading the Black Protestant Coalition Against United Way in the 1980s to gain more African American input in the dispersal of funds from that charity.



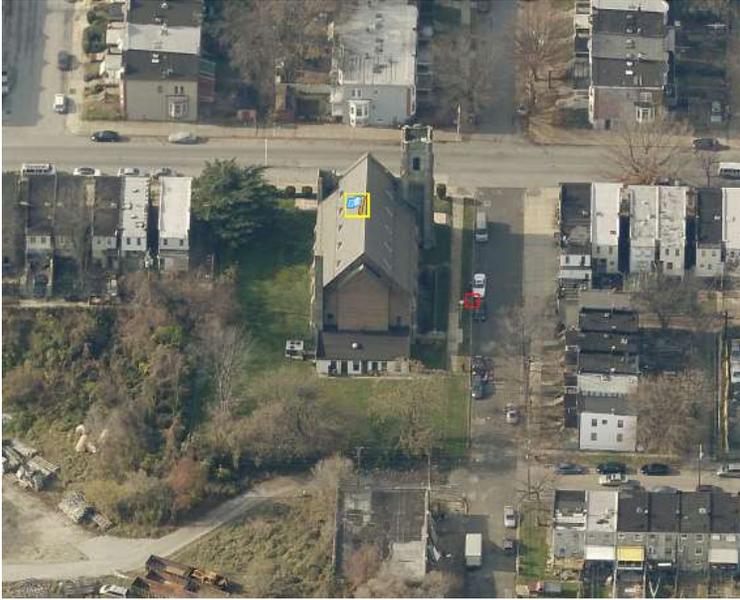
## Current Photographs



View from the west.



View from the south.



View from the east.



View from the north.

---

<sup>1</sup>“Real Estate Transaction 1 -- No Title” The Sun (1837-1990); Jun 29, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 16

<sup>2</sup>“IMMANUEL'S JUBILEE: GERMAN REFORMED CONGREGATION IS THIRTY-FIVE YEARS ...” The Sun (1837-1990); Oct 28, 1901; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 10

<sup>3</sup>“GIRLS' CONFERENCE TO OPEN NEXT WEEK: UNDENOMINATIONAL SESSIONS ...” The Sun (1837-1990); May 3, 1924; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 4

<sup>4</sup>“IMMANUEL'S JUBILEE: GERMAN REFORMED CONGREGATION IS THIRTY-FIVE YEARS ...”; Baltimore City Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1901-1902, Vol. 2, 1901, Sheet 126.

<sup>5</sup> Deed, Edmondson Realty Company to German Reformed Immanuel Congregation, Baltimore City Superior Court (Land Records) SCL Liber 3771, Folio 588.

- 
- <sup>6</sup> “REAL ESTATE DEALS AND BUILDING NEWS: <SPAN ...”, *The Sun* (1837-1990); Apr 2, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. CA16
- <sup>7</sup> “Real Estate Transaction 1 -- No Title”, *The Sun* (1837-1990); Jun 29, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 16
- <sup>8</sup> “REAL ESTATE DEALS AND BUILDING NEWS: <SPAN ...”; *Manufacturers’ Record, Volume 82* (Baltimore: Manufacturers’ Record Publishing Co.) Volume 82, No. 1, July 6, 1922, pg. 108  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=aM0aAQAAMAAJ&q>
- <sup>9</sup> *Manufacturers’ Record, Volume 82*
- <sup>10</sup> Kelly Dale Terrill, *Reservoir Hill* (Arcadia Publishing, 2013), pg. 36; “REAL ESTATE DEALS AND BUILDING NEWS: Work On Construction Of Synagogue Expected To Begin Soon” *The Sun* (1837-1990); Dec 20, 1925; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. S5; “REAL ESTATE DEALS AND BUILDING NEWS: Permits For 338 Dwellings Asked By John Welsh, Cost \$780,000” *The Sun* (1837-1990); Apr 5, 1931; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. S10
- <sup>11</sup> Deed, German Reformed Immanuel Congregation to St. Mark’s Institutional Baptist Church, Baltimore City Superior Court (Land Records) MLP Liber 10096, Folio 71.
- <sup>12</sup> “The History of St. Mark’s Institutional Baptist Church” On file at the church.
- <sup>13</sup> “Rev. Spencer G. Dobson dies; founded St. Mark’s Institutional Baptist Church”, *The Sun* (1837-1990); Nov 21, 1987; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 3C
- <sup>14</sup> Frederick N. Rasmussen, “The Rev. Harold L. Dobson Sr., 74, pastor, champion for youth: [FINAL Edition]” *The Sun* [Baltimore, Md] 10 Jan 2000: 4B.
- <sup>15</sup> “The History of St. Mark’s Institutional Baptist Church”
- <sup>16</sup> “Rev. Spencer G. Dobson dies; founded St. Mark’s Institutional Baptist Church”,
- <sup>17</sup> “The History of St. Mark’s Institutional Baptist Church”
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; Ian Duncan “Civil rights leader founded BUILD: Longtime pastor at Union Baptist Church started the Maryland Food Bank” *The Sun* [Baltimore, Md] 27 Jan 2013: A16;